

# **Testimony of Mark Brewer Regarding Congressional Redistricting**

## **Before the Michigan House of Representatives Redistricting and Elections Committee June 21, 2011**

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, I am Mark Brewer, Chair of the Michigan Democratic Party. I have been involved in Legislative and Congressional redistricting in Michigan since the early 1980's. Thank you for allowing me to submit this testimony on Congressional redistricting.

### **Introduction**

On behalf of the voters of Michigan, the Michigan Democratic Party is very disappointed in the partisan hijacking of the redistricting process represented by the Congressional redistricting plan proposed by Republicans on June 17, 2011. Never in Michigan's history has a redistricting map been gerrymandered to be so overtly partisan and disrespectful of community interests to build partisan political advantage. This map zigs and zags throughout Southeastern Michigan to create non-competitive seats that do not represent the demographics of the state and will disenfranchise voters. Outstate districts also are plainly redrawn to advantage Republican incumbents.

The people of Michigan deserve Congressional districts produced by the State Legislature and signed by the Governor that will ensure fair representation in keeping with Michigan's history of competitive districts that respect communities of interest. The people of Michigan deserve to choose their Representatives in Congress - this map clearly was drawn to let the Republican Representatives choose their voters.

### **Analysis**

At a time when population loss over the last decade reduces our State's influence in Congress by one Congressional seat, it is absolutely essential that redistricting be conducted in a fair manner to fully reflect all of the citizens of our State.

The Congressional plan released by State Legislative Republicans fails any test of fairness, preservation of community and county boundaries, and meaningful representation.

The map shreds counties and communities, eliminates competitive districts, and reduces representation in the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest county in the State.

## Gerrymandered Districts

Never before in Michigan's history have districts zigged and zagged all over a large geographic region for partisan advantage.

The two Detroit districts are no longer centered in Detroit. For example, District 14 starts at the edge of River Rouge, sweeps over the Pointes, loops west to Southfield and Farmington Hills, before heading north and using a small stretch of land at Sylvan Lake to get to Pontiac. The district is over 50 miles long but at some points less than half a mile wide.

District 11, previously a Western Wayne and Western Oakland County district now starts in Canton and stretches all the way over and around Pontiac, cutting through a slice of Rochester Hills to connect to Troy before looping around to capture Birmingham and Bloomfield Hills. By taking in Farmington, it is literally only a few blocks wide at one point.

As a result, Oakland County, the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest county in Michigan, is shredded into four different districts that all start somewhere else. As a result Oakland County will not have one district centered there.

Oakland County Executive L. Brooks Patterson agreed, saying the county should get more respect. "We'll have nobody to call our own. We won't get the attention or the call back (residents would get) if we had our own congressman, Republican or Democrat," he said. (Detroit Free Press, June 16, 2011)

Examples of partisan gerrymandering exist outstate as well.

The 3rd District now includes Calhoun County. Why? It is clearly an attempt to make the 7th District more Republican to help Republican Congressman Tim Walberg, and hinder former Democratic Congressman Mark Schauer, a resident of Calhoun County, from running again.

In the 1st District, several Democratic leaning counties were removed and several Republican leaning counties added. Why? To help ensure the reelection of Republican Congressman Dan Benishek.

## Non-Competitive Districts

Competitive districts are better for voters and better for democracy. Over the last decade, Michigan has seen competitive Congressional races in at least four districts and in the decade before that five districts were competitive. They reflected the competitive nature of our state overall as surveys show that the state is equally divided between Democrats, and Republicans.

The Republican plan would reduce the number of competitive districts. There is not one district under the Republican plan that is 50-50 in partisan make-up when one reviews previous election results. It is clear they sought solely to strengthen the partisan make-up for their Congressional Republican incumbents.

By reducing competitive districts, this plan disenfranchises not only Democrats and Republicans but independent voters – by making partisan primaries the key elections and making general elections irrelevant.

### Violates Community Boundaries

Michigan has a tradition of respecting city and county lines in redistricting. This plan ignores that tradition to seek partisan advantage for Republican incumbents.

For example, in Oakland County, the City of Farmington is an “island” surrounded by Farmington Hills. For the first time, Republicans use a narrow path to cut through to the City of Farmington and separate it from Farmington Hills. Similarly, the City of Bloomfield Hills is separated from Bloomfield Township. Rochester Hills is split up simply to allow the Republicans to make their gerrymander contiguous. In Montcalm County, the City of Greenville is also an “island”.

In the short space of 18 miles in southeast Michigan, a voter could go through 8 Congressional districts. Driving south from Orion Township in the 8<sup>th</sup> District, you then enter the 11<sup>th</sup> Congressional District in Auburn Hills before passing into the 14<sup>th</sup> District in Pontiac. You will then enter the 9<sup>th</sup> District in Bloomfield Township before re-entering the 11<sup>th</sup> District in Bloomfield Hills before entering the 9<sup>th</sup> District again before going through the 14<sup>th</sup> District again in Southfield before finally entering the 13<sup>th</sup> District in Detroit.

If you drove on Woodward from Pontiac to Detroit you would start in the 14th District, and drive through the 9th District in Bloomfield Township. You would then enter the 11th District while driving through Bloomfield Hills, drive through the 9th again in Bloomfield Township. You then re-enter the 11th in Birmingham before re-entering the 9th District in Royal Oak. When you hit 8 Mile you would enter the 14th District again until you got downtown when you enter the 13th District. You would then arrive at the Detroit River waterfront, 24 miles later, in the same district you left, the 14th District. On this straightforward drive on Woodward you pass through the 14th District 3 times, the 9th District 3 times, the 11th District twice, and the 13th District once.

### Conclusion

Voters in Michigan have never before faced such a shamelessly partisan redrawing of Congressional boundaries. Instead of drawing fair lines that follow community and county borders in a logical way, the Republican plan is so skewed that it exploits every trick in the book to gerrymander districts in ways that benefit Republican incumbents. The Legislature and Governor Snyder should reject this gerrymandered plan and draw Congressional boundaries in a way that puts Michigan voters’ interests squarely ahead of flagrant partisan advantage.